This is an introductory design guide for good quality shopfronts in Hastings and St Leonards and has been produced by Hastings Borough Council to support an award scheme for the best independent shopfronts on the main shopping streets in St Leonards. The ‘Excellence in Shopfront Design’ initiative is being introduced by the St Leonards Town Team to reward outstanding practice in shopfront design.

The outward appearance of shops indicates a town’s quality, character and image. In our town, many of the shopping streets are in designated conservation areas and our town is fortunate that many original shopfronts survive. Well-designed and interesting shopfronts and displays make a street a more attractive place to shop and have been proven to increase footfall and therefore, revenues.

In this guide, a ‘shopfront’ includes all ground-floor premises with a fascia sign and/or display window, including other commercial uses such as building societies, banks, estate agents and restaurants. An attractive and well-designed shopfront will create a good impression to potential customers and entice customers into the shop.

Whether you are designing a new shopfront or planning to alter or replace an existing one, there are some basic principles of good design that can be applied. Replacing a shopfront can be costly and requires planning permission. However, many of the measures mentioned in this guide, can effectively increase the desirability of a shop without too much expense.

For further guidance please refer to the HBC Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Shopfronts and advertisements www.hastings.gov.uk/shopfront_ads
This diagram shows a typical original Victorian shopfront and the architectural features it comprises. Where any original features are intact, it is important in a conservation area that these are retained, restored and not obscured.

*Shopfront Design Guide, London Borough of Waltham Forest*
The fascia is considered to be the most noticeable element of the shopfront and for this reason, special care should be taken on its design.

Fascias should not overly dominate the shopfront or street. The size of the signage should reflect the scale and sizing of the original Victorian fascias in the area to create a uniformity of proportions along the street.

The fascia should not encroach on or above first floor level, extend uninterrupted across a number of buildings, or obscure other architectural details.

Projecting signs should be high quality and relate to the size and scale of the facade.

Traditional painted lettering and designs are preferable. Too many different kinds of projecting and hanging signs can look cluttered. There should normally be only one per building.
Traditionally, timber is the material used for shopfronts. It is versatile, durable, easily and cheaply maintained or altered. These may be painted, or occasionally, polished mahogany or oak can be used. Where appropriate to the design, other quality materials could be used including bronze, chrome, marble or ceramic tiling.

Bulky box fascias, plastics and vinyls should not be fitted over wooden fascias or obscure other architectural features. Signage is frequently affixed to a fascia with visible screw fixings, which detracts from the overall quality of the fascia. Additionally, modern materials are more difficult to maintain in situ as they cannot be easily renovated if they become dilapidated.

Traditional signwriting, digitally produced traditional style signage and cut out/raised lettering affixed to the original wooden fascia are considered appropriate for older buildings, especially conservation area retail premises.

The colour scheme should complement the character and appearance of the building. The use of traditional, rich colours is generally recommended. Heritage and more muted colours are usually the most appropriate in a conservation environment.
If you are looking to upgrade your shopfront, it is worth looking at the opportunities that you already have. Re-using existing features can be cost effective and sustainable as the timber originally used would usually have been a very high quality, durable hard wood.

Revealing original features can add interest and create a unique focal point for your shop. Cast iron or brass ventilation grilles, terrazzo floors, wall or floor tiling and original hand painted advertising, for example, can be revealed to enhance the appearance of the shopfront or interior. Also try to retain interesting or historic shop fittings, such as original shop counters and display cabinets.

- Retain original shop fittings.
- Reveal unique original features.
Canopies/Blinds

Existing original/traditional canvas blinds and blind boxes should be retained and refurbished. Non-retractable Dutch blinds or balloon canopies can obscure the fascia and other detailing and dominate the frontage.

A retractable canopy may work where it does not project too far forward, or obscure architectural features.

When a new external blind is essential, a retractable flat roller blind, which extends the full width of the shopfront (between pilasters to be the same width as the fascia) is preferable.

The colour of blinds should be subdued. Gaudy colours are not generally appropriate. The colour of the fascia and that of the blind should be complementary.

Blinds should be sited well away from the front edge of the road kerb and not cause obstruction, or danger to passers-by.

A well presented retractable canopy. A fixed canopy in poor condition.
The first impression of a shop is crucial and a good window display can tempt a passerby into the shop or easily turn them away. A shop window should be attractive, creative, simple and uncluttered, giving a clear sense of what the retailer is selling. A crowded display showing random items, can be confusing and is less appealing to the shopper.

A bright and clear window display. Too many and poorly displayed leaflets.

Leaflets in windows should be kept to a minimum and thoughtfully displayed without obscuring the front window display. Too many notices can make a shop look tatty and weaken your shop’s message and image. It is recommended that if a small number of leaflets are needed, then these be displayed in a recessed doorway, or in dedicated areas for notices. Obvious use of blu tak for displaying the leaflets can look scruffy and unprofessional.

A boarded display or window vinyls that obscures the view into the shop can create a barrier, making shoppers reluctant to enter if they cannot see in.
Appropriate lighting can contribute colour, interest and vitality and make an area more safe and welcoming in the evening.

Either the exterior of the premises could be illuminated, or the window display. Many successful retailers include lighting as part of their shopfront design as it promotes window shopping in the evening.

However, illumination should not distract or issue glare. Lights should not intrude into residential property, and energy efficient light bulbs used. Lighting should be fixed to the fascia, painted to match or made of brass.

An effectively lit window display.
Solid external shutters can affect street character, contributing to an unwelcoming and hostile environment at night and often attract graffiti.

Ideally, laminated glass provides security without affecting the appearance of the building. Decorative grills can be attractive whilst also providing security. Internal lattice grills are also effective, with the housing situated behind the fascia where possible. It enables goods to remain on display at night, encourages window shopping and gives a high quality appearance.

For shops, such as jewellers that have special security needs, consider an open grille design to allow light onto the street and enable passers-by to see inside.

Alarm boxes should be sited sensitively and should not obscure or damage architectural detailing. If the box is on the shopfront, then the best position is usually at a corner of the fascia. The box should be painted to suit the shop colour scheme on a conservation area or listed building.
With careful design, contemporary shopfronts can sit well within a conservation area. Good quality modern design, that respects and is in proportion to the traditional elements, should reflect the key principles mentioned above.

In this instance, fascias in more modern materials can be used if they are of a very high quality, material, design, colour and appropriate size.

A simple but well designed modern shopfront.

Please note this document does not substitute HBC Supplementary Planning Document on Shopfronts and advertisements and is only meant to be used as a handy guide to aid the award scheme. People wishing to apply for planning permission should refer to the SPD www.hastings.gov.uk/shopfront_ads

Please contact HBC Development Management team for further support and guidance:

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